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Inside Washington

Who Will Be Ford's VP Choice?

Following Reagan's bombshell selection of Schweiker, the White House is now making a fancy production of President Ford's method of choosing a vice presidential running mate, insisting Ford will contact party leaders and delegates for advice.

In a letter he is sending to 4,518 delegates and alternates to the Republican National Convention, Ford says he wants a running mate who is "capable of leading the country...disposed to work in full harmony with the chief executive...an asset in the November campaign and a major contributor to governing the country in these next four years." And he asks each delegate and alternate to "...furnish not less than five choices in order of your preference." He asks that they sign their replies and submit them by August 11. "I assure you," the President writes, "that your response will be handled in complete confidence."

Sen. Hugh Scott (R.-Pa.), the GOP leader in the upper chamber, and House Minority Leader John Rhodes (R.-Ariz.) have been asked to poll members of Congress for their choice, while Republican National Chairman Mary Louise Smith is polling party officials at all levels.

What the President is trying to suggest by all this folderol, of course, is that he will let the sentiment of the Republican party be his guide for the VP spot. But judging from the record, there is no reason whatsoever for Republicans to be reassured that Ford will choose someone in keeping with mainstream Republicanism.

What seems to have been forgotten by almost everyone is that the President went through similar motions in August 1974, before he finally unveiled an unpopular Nelson Rockefeller as his vice presidential choice.

AS HUMAN EVENTS reported at the time:

"Rocky was not even the favorite of those party people Ford had requested to submit nomination sug-



In Ford's selection of a Vice President following the Nixon resignation, George Bush (above) was the most often named favorite of those party activists polled.

gestions. GOP National Chairman George Bush, who is perceived as a conservative and made his political reputation in Texas, was named most often on the more than 300 formal recommendations Ford had received from Senate and House Republicans, GOP governors, national committeemen and others.

"Where Rockefeller showed up in the formal recommendations was not divulged by Ford aides to newsmen at the regular press briefings. The only answer one could extract from Ford aide Robert Hartmann, who had kept tabs on the vice presidential names submitted, was that Rocky's name was 'close to the top.' In other words, he could have been third, fourth, fifth or even more down the line."

In short, Ford, after going through an elaborate effort to make GOP party leaders think they would have a real say in the VP selection, totally ignored their advice. Moreover, he chose to thumb his nose at the party by selecting a man who had devoted a major part of his adult political life to crushing the conservative influence in the GOP.

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Whatever one thinks about Reagan's choice of Schweiker, the California conservative can at least say that Schweiker told him he was disillusioned with big-spending programs, promised to sell conservatism and even pledged to implement the Reagan philosophy should the Californian die in office.

Ford picked Rocky knowing he was still a big-spend liberal who favored such things as comprehensive national health insurance and the federalization of welfare, and then promised to make him head of the Domestic Council, which has a large say in shaping the President's domestic programs.

Because of the way he ignored mainstream Republican advice in the Rockefeller selection, then, many of the delegates are not at all convinced that Ford is going to listen to them this time around. And the President's press secretary, Ron Nessen, hasn't helped persuade anybody with his own statements. Nessen gives no indication as to how much weight Ford will give the responses, says the White House won't even make public any summation of the preferences expressed, and won't say whether the President will make a decision before or after his own nomination.